



THE OZ TRIP

The Twentieth Century began in OZ, a fairyland that emanated from the brain of Lyman Frank Baum. His Utopia, where no one ever needed money, got sick, or died, provided a happy alternative to the real world of 1900 as described in the writings of realists like Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Upton Sinclair. Librarians as a group didn't like *THE WIZARD OF OZ* in the first place and, hearing there would be sequels, condemned it as a "series" book. As a result, it was not on the library shelves in spite of being a best seller, indeed, one of a handful of books that has never stopped being a best seller. No one knows how many editions are out there since the *Wiz* went into public domain in 1956. How come? Because of the 1939 movie which had rather buxom Judy Garland playing little Dorothy? Well, perhaps, but the fact is that many people I talk to have never actually read Baum's book. They think they know the story because the movie is screened every year over a holiday, but the movie changed a lot of Baum's book. Took all of the gore and violence out, that's for sure. No dead Kalidahs. The Tin Woodman doesn't get into it with the wolves, and the Scarecrow, well, try to picture Ray Bolger tearing the heads off 40 of the Wicked Witch of the West's crows. You see, that European fairy tale world that stimulated Baum and other writers of what has become known as "children's literature" was not the cute sentimental place projected by Hollywood; it was a world of cannibal giants, evil dragons, jealous and murderous stepmothers--generally, a terrifying place, not one to send a little kid off to pleasant dreams. Ironically, Baum wrote of getting away from the gore and terror of European fairy tales, but he did not follow through. Take the story of the Tin Woodman, Nick Chopper. He got in bad with a witch and she enchanted an ax which proceeded to cut Nick up. Each time he lost a body part, it was replaced by a tinsmith until he was a total tin man. His motive for going to see Oz was to get himself a heart. Talk about your Texas Chainsaw Massacre syndrome.

Baum, actor, salesman, chicken farmer, hack writer, wrote 14 OZ books before his death on May 6, 1919. It's said he liked the Tin Woodman of OZ best, which is curious, because this is the goriest of the lot. In the story, Nick goes in search of his youthful love, Nimmie Amee, meeting on the way, Captain Fyter, who has become a tin man a la Nick. Both go to see Ku Klip, the smith, where they learn about Chopfyt, a character who is a composite of both of *THEIR* original bodies. Why didn't those old body parts just rot away? Well, nothing ever dies in OZ, remember. A person may be cut into little pieces, but all of the pieces just go on living, so old Ku Klip just patched Chopfyt together, and, guess what? The tin guys find Chopfyt married to their ex-Munchkin love, Nimmie Amee. And this bride of Frankenstein is happy! She won't leave Chopfyt for either Nick or Captain Fyter. Tell this story to your five-year-old at bedtime. Actually, Baum was in poor health at this time and the book reflects it. He had gall bladder surgery and spent the last 18 months of his life bedridden, hardly the type of situation to inspire the type of uplifting prose one expected to find in the yearly Christmas OZ book.

Baum didn't really like OZ all that much. He was stuck with it the way an actor on a popular t-v series is stuck today. He wanted to write other things, and many of them, like *THE MAGICAL MONARCH OF MO* and *QUEEN ZIXI OF IX* are better than a lot of the material that is repeated over and over in the endless OZ canon. Baum's imagination always transcended his writing ability. He never ceased to come up with new characters, though he often did not know what to do with them. His works are elaborate travel-ogues, long visits through the endless corridors of a fairyland museum filled with living sawhorses, stuffed men and women like the Scarecrow and Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, and bizarre villains like the Roly Rogues who bounce around like animated basketballs. Experiences are usually collective in Baum, seldom individual. His method is to assemble a group of characters, usually four, and take them on an adventure to a strange land or to OZ. It's always fun being inside one of these manufactured adventures and in the heat of the action, one forgets that there is never any real threat, because the principals are always looked out for by Ozma and Glinda the Good. Ozma, the ruler of OZ, has a magic picture which shows her anything and anyplace in OZ upon request, kind of an extension of the wicked Queen's mirror from the Grimm version of *SNOW WHITE*. Seeing Dorothy or the Shaggy Man or Scarecrow or any of her other friends in trouble, Ozma may simply bring them back to her palace by using her magic powers. Glinda has a book in her room which contains an account of everything that happens the minute it happens, so all she has to do is read that and she will know one of the favored ones is in peril and she can save them. Ozma's mirror, like Rob's Record of Events in *THE MASTER KEY* (1902), foreshadows television. I might note here that *THE MASTER KEY* probably influenced Wylie and Balmer who did *GLADIATOR* (1930), the book closely imitated by the young Jerry Siegel when he was scripting the first *SUPERMAN* episode in 1932. Rob in *THE MASTER KEY* has a flying device, given to him by the Demon of Electricity, kind of a compass on a wrist strap. The Demon appears in a flash of lighting very much like Captain Marvel, hence I suspect Otto Binder and C. C. Beck of reading *KEY*.

OZ, well, you may have been there; if you've seen a map of Disneyland, just compare it to the published map of OZ and you will see that the Sleeping Beauty's castle is situated in Disneyland just about where the Emerald City is in OZ. The various countries correspond to the lands, etc. There was a time when Baum had in mind buying an island off the coast of California and building an OZ theme park there, but that was just another of his impractical and unfulfilled fantasies. He did live on Coronado in his last years, an island then, linked with San Diego by ferry boat. Baum was born in Chittenango, near Syracuse in New York. He lived for awhile in Aberdeen, South Dakota, then in Chicago, and finally in Hollywood and Coronado. Always the actor, producer, he was never satisfied with his books as books; he always wanted them on stage or on film, but he was never a member of the Hollywood clique and his OZ films never got the distribution that might have ensured their success. Onstage, he had two hits, *THE WIZARD OF OZ* and *THE TIK TOK MAN OF OZ*.

Born wealthy, Baum accepted all the trappings of European royalty and their RIGHTNESS. No farmer in OZ ever questions Ozma's



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rule. Baum says everyone works in OZ and there is no money, that all is done out of love and kindness, yet the Princess and Dorothy and all of their friends are served and do not work; indeed, the glamour of the OZ books for the normal reader in 1900-1919 lay in this work-free culture; we must recall that children were still working in the mines and the slaughterhouses at this time. The reader who wants to get the full impact should read THE EMERALD CITY OF OZ along with THE JUNGLE (1906). Had the immigrant children been able to read though, I am certain they would have loved OZ and all of its fantasy characters.

Most of Baum's characters are like stuffed animals; once introduced, they do not change; indeed, all change in OZ is through magic. All experience in OZ is existential. There is no growth in fairyland. OZ changed slightly after the first book, because there was no intention on Baum's part to do more than a single OZ book and faced with a series he had to modify some of his original ideas. Even the title was wrong, because the Wizard WAS OZ, he was not OF OZ. He introduces himself, saying, "I am OZ, etc." Since the Wicked Witch of the East is killed when Dorothy's Kansas house crashes on her in the Munchkin Country, there was death in OZ, hence the later story that Lurline, Queen of the Fairies, has enchanted OZ so that nothing ever changes. Well, here is a new horror for anyone who thinks about it. If a woman was pregnant when the enchantment took place, then she will be pregnant forever. Babies will never grow up. How Baum could have conceived this as a situation in which everyone was happy and contented is beyond me, but then why a monarchy should be necessary in a fairyland is also beyond me. Though he wanted to create a specifically American form of fairy tale, Baum was never able to dump all those princesses and queens. I've read a lot of critical material on Baum lately and I always get upset when I read that Baum was supposed to be The Wizard or The Tin Woodman--a writer is ALL of his characters, and though the Wizard does share some affinities with Baum (who had a certain affection for humbuggery), he clearly symbolizes the father in the story; what's going on is easy for anyone to see; a group of kids go to see Daddy to ask him for the things they need and want. I mean, hey, guys, it was Baum's father, Benjamin, who blew it and lost his oil business (so OZ blows it and loses OZ, huh?).

Del Rey has reissued all of Baum's OZ books and they are now in the process of reissuing the subsequent 19 done by Ruth Plumly Thompson. Dover has Baum's AMERICAN FAIRY TALES, MASTER KEY, and JOHN DOUGH AND THE CHERUB, MAGICAL MONARCH OF MO, QUEEN ZIXI OF IX, and THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS. There are items like the OZ SCRAPBOOK, ANNOTATED OZ, and the McFall biography, but these are rarely available. An OZ society was formed in 1957 and it issues THE BAUM BUGLE. Early OZ material, including books and games, is expensive, and rarely available outside antique stores and special yearly OZ conventions. Check your local library and antique stores for addresses.

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